

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today, Congressman Jim Costa (D-Fresno) sent a letter to Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovich, the new nominee to be the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Armenia. Costa asked Ambassador Yovanovich to answer questions about her feelings on the events that happened in Turkey between 1915 and 1923.

“It is important that the United States fill this empty diplomatic position in Yerevan, Armenia,” said Costa. “But before she is confirmed by the United States Senate, it is critical for my constituents and me to know her thoughts on the first genocide of the 20th century: the Armenian Genocide.”

Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch of Connecticut, is a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Counselor, and was nominated on June 3, 2005 to serve as the next Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Kyrgyz Republic. She was confirmed by the United States Senate on June 30, 2005.

The text of Costa's letter is below.

The Honorable Marie L. Yovanovich
Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic
2201 “C” Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Ambassador Yovanovich:

Congratulations on your recent nomination to be our Ambassador to the Republic of Armenia. Your experience and current service as Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic makes you an ideal candidate to serve in Armenia.

As you are well aware, the United States has not had an Ambassador in Yerevan since former Ambassador John M. Evans correctly stated the slaughter of 1.5 million Armenians between 1915 and 1923 was the first acknowledged genocide of the 20th century. I believe it is in the best interest of our nation to have this position filled, but it is also important that my constituents know your views of the Armenian Genocide, as this issue can strengthen or hurt our relationship with the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian-American community.

It is, by any reasonable standard, established history that between 1915 and 1923 the Ottoman Empire systematically killed an estimated 1.5 million Armenians and drove hundreds of thousands of others into exile from their ancestral homeland. The record of this atrocity is well documented in the United States Archives and has been universally accepted in the International Association of Genocide Scholars and the broader historical and academic communities.

Two days after the Ottoman Empire launched the genocide, the New York Times reported a story with the headline “Kurds Massacre More Armenians”, and followed up this story for the next year with reports of the mass slaughter occurring in the Ottoman Empire. On October 4th, 1915, the Times ran a front page article about a report from the Committee on Armenian Atrocities discussing exactly what was happening to Armenians in Turkey. “The report tells of children under 15 years of age thrown into the Euphrates to be drowned; of women forced to desert infants in arms and to leave them by the roadside to die; of young women and girls appropriated by the Turks, thrown into harems, attacked, or else sold to the highest bidder, and of men murdered and tortured.”

My district is home to many of Armenian-Americans, and many want to know your views on the Armenian Genocide. I would like you to respond to the questions below so I can get an insight on your opinion of the Armenian Genocide and how you plan to resolve this ongoing issue between Turkey and Armenia.

1. Under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which the U.S. is a party, it was decided that genocide occurs when three criteria are met. In your view, does the killing and exile of 1.5 million Armenians meet these criteria? If it does not, please explain why it does not.

2. On March 15, 2007, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee and stated that the question of the Armenian Genocide “should be resolved not by politicians, but through heartfelt introspection by historians, philosophers, and common people.” However, in 1998, a group of 150 scholars of history, theology and law encouraged their governments to officially recognize the Armenian Genocide as such. Is this the type of “heartfelt introspection” from “historians, philosophers, and common people” that Secretary Fried spoke of? If so, why has the United States not recognized the Armenian Genocide? If it does not, please explain why.

3. Have you done any personal research on the Armenian Genocide? If so, what is your personal opinion about the events that occurred between 1915 and 1923?

4. What is your plan to strengthen ties with the Armenian-American community?

5. Is there a plan to bring Turkey to the table and discuss with them the facts of the Armenian Genocide?

A United States ambassador to a foreign nation has to clearly know and understand the pulse, feeling and thoughts of those nations' citizens to effectively design a diplomatic program while they are working there. For example, an ambassador to Cambodia would need to acknowledge their genocide because it has shaped the psychology of that nation today. It has shaped the way the citizens of Cambodia look at world events, political threats, cooperation with other nations, and trade policies. The same is true for Israel or Rwanda. Denying a traumatic event such as genocide, one cannot create, nor implement, honest and effective diplomacy, nor gain the trust of that nation in conducting bilateral relations.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your quick reply.

Sincerely,

JIM COSTA

Member of Congress